



Spartan warrior

Early Civilizations: India, China, and Greece



Reader



Ancient Chinese
container



Shiva

Ancient Greek mural



Early Civilizations: India, China, and Greece

Reader



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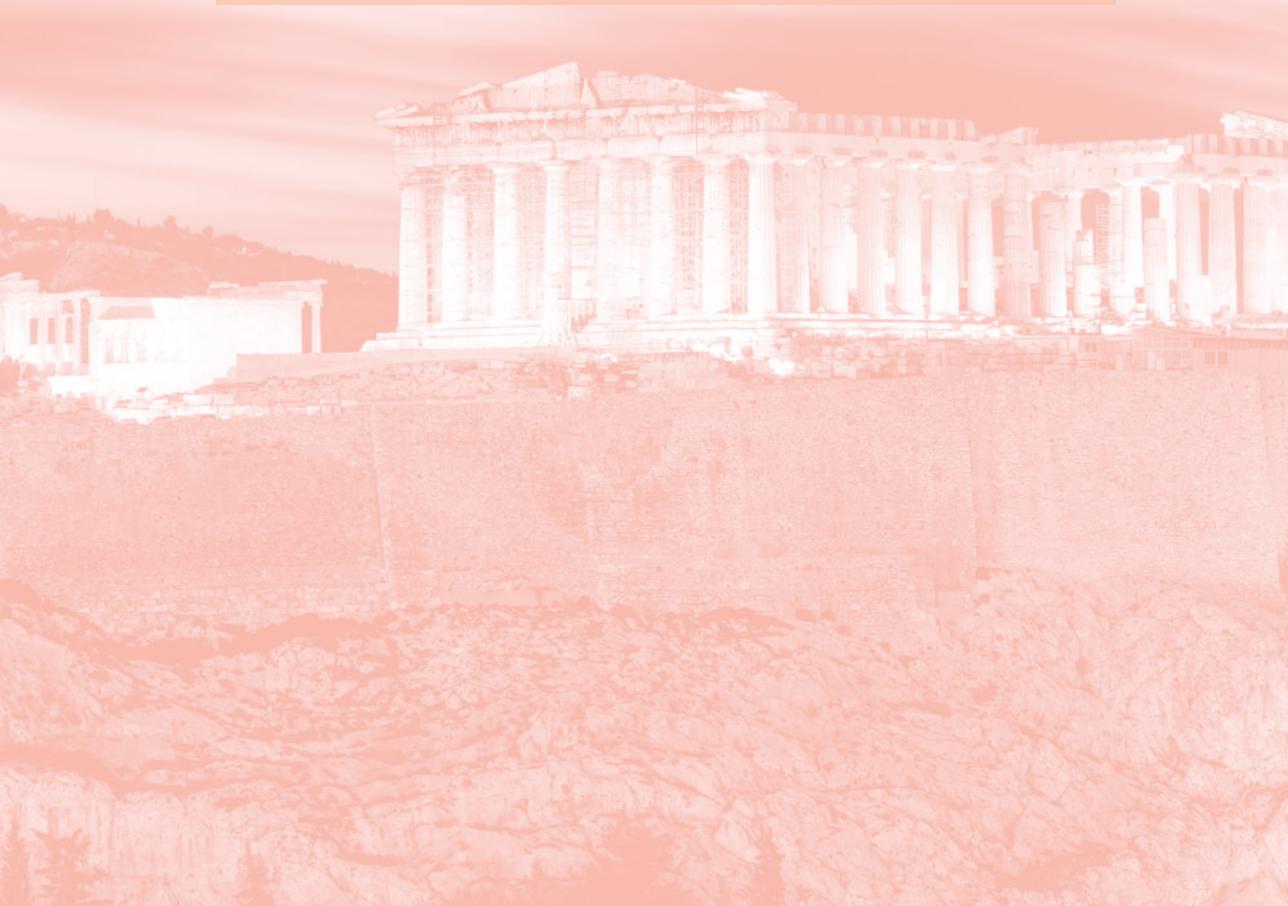
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Chapter 1

Ancient India

A Diverse and Fertile Land

Three major world religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, arose in ancient India. They later spread far and wide, influencing many cultures. Early Indian civilizations also created magnificent art and literature. The people living there began thinking about math, science, and technology in new, more advanced ways.

India is in the Northern and Eastern Hemispheres in South Asia. It lies on a peninsula called a **subcontinent**. This long, wide peninsula is somewhat separated from the rest of the continent of Asia, in large part by mountains. The Himalayas, the highest mountains in the world, stretch across the northern end of the region. Another mountain range, the Hindu Kush, sits to the west of the Himalayas. These massive mountains form a natural boundary between India and Central Asia. In addition to India, the subcontinent also includes parts of Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

The Framing Question

What ideas, practices, and events developed across the vast Indian subcontinent several thousand years ago?

Vocabulary

subcontinent, n. a major subdivision of a continent



Like other early civilizations, the peoples of ancient India depended on the regular flooding of major rivers, including the Indus River.

The subcontinent is home to many types of landforms, including mountains, coastlines, deserts, hills, and plains. Its land meets the Arabian Sea in the southwest and the Bay of Bengal (part of the Indian Ocean) in the southeast. The central area of the subcontinent has many **plateaus**. Some of these plateaus have little water but contain valuable minerals, such as coal. In the north and south, rivers create lush land well-suited for agriculture. The regions near two of these rivers, the Ganges in the northeast and the Indus in the northwest, were home to ancient peoples.

Vocabulary

plateau, n. a large, flat area of land that is higher than the surrounding lands

Ancient India



Ancient Indian civilization developed across almost all of the land that makes up the country of India today.

Indus Valley Civilization

The Indus valley culture began as far back as nine thousand years ago. Civilizations eventually developed from villages to larger cities in the northwestern part of the subcontinent around 2600 BCE. They were located along the Indus River, in much of the area now known as Pakistan. The surrounding land was often dry, but the soil near the river system was fertile enough to support farming. A wind known as the **monsoon** caused a rainy season from April to October. These heavy rains caused flooding, but they also provided water for crops, people, and animals.

Vocabulary

monsoon, n. a wind from the south or southwest that brings heavy rainfall to Asia during the summer months

The people living in the Indus River valley farmed and kept livestock. Farmers rotated the fields they used for certain crops to keep the soil healthy and fertile. Rice, other grains, dates, lentils, and sesame grew well, as did many fruit trees and vegetables. Oxen were used to pull plows. Other animals were also **domesticated**, such as goats, sheep, and even elephants. Elephants were useful in construction because they could lift, push, and carry heavy loads. As people learned better ways to farm, they grew more crops. Now they could feed a larger population without having to move elsewhere for food.

Vocabulary

domesticate, v. to tame and use for agricultural or other purposes

Indus Valley Achievements

The people of the Indus valley formed many settlements and villages. Their civilization eventually included an area as large as present-day France—larger than ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia combined. It included several important cities, including Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. (The second city's name is one reason why Indus valley civilization is also called Harappan civilization.) Both cities had large streets laid out in an organized grid pattern and paved with bricks. These bricks were made of clay and straw and baked in the sun or in ovens. In other places, people constructed complex systems for managing water. Skeletons discovered in settlements have helped historians better understand the origins of the people of the Indus civilization.

The many achievements of the people who lived in the Indus valley can also be seen in how and what they built. Like the streets, houses and buildings were also constructed with bricks.



Some of the brick walls and streets of Mohenjo-Daro can still be found in Pakistan today.

These structures had wooden roofs, courtyards, and bathrooms. Wells brought fresh water to the houses. Drains and sewers carried away wastewater. The Indus people did not build huge temples or palaces. But they did build granaries, or buildings where they could store the extra grain they had grown. They also built protective walls around their cities.

A stable food supply also meant that people could work in jobs other than farming. They were free to specialize in other types of work. For example, craftspeople made objects needed for work, such as copper and stone tools, and for enjoyment, such as **terra-cotta** figurines, chessboards, and toys. Other people built docks, waterways, and possibly some of the first wheeled vehicles in the world. Still others made boats out of woven plants or cloth. Traders shipped goods on these boats for trade with other regions. In exchange for their goods (and extra crops), the people of the Indus valley received materials they did not have at home, such as copper and gold.

Vocabulary

terra-cotta, n.
baked or hardened
brownish-red clay

The Indus people also developed a system of weighing and measuring that people across regions could all use. Additionally, they used **seals** to mark ownership. A written language of symbols appears on many of these seals, as well as on pottery and tablets. These records likely contain information about trade and other daily activities. No one has yet learned how to read this ancient language. Other discoveries have revealed that the people of the Indus valley played chess later on.

Vocabulary

seal, n. an object that is pressed into a soft material to leave a design or other mark

After several centuries, the Indus civilization faded away. Historians know that many people moved east, near the Ganges River. This shift was due to environmental changes, which affected the water supply that people had long depended on for farming.

Hinduism and the Vedas

Around 1500 BCE, more changes took place in the Indus valley region, including the development of a written language called Sanskrit. This language was used first to keep records and then to write down stories, prayers, and traditions that people had known for years. These writings were later gathered into a collection known as the Vedas, some of the oldest religious texts in the world. These texts give the period from about 1500 to 500 BCE its name: the Vedic period.

Religion was a major part of ancient India. The Vedas are the oldest texts of Hinduism, a religion that began during the Vedic period. The texts contain the central beliefs of Hinduism, which involve how the universe is continuously created, preserved, and destroyed in different ways. The Vedas are said to be inspired by wise men who heard truths from the gods. The sacred books are the basis for Hinduism and are still read by Hindus today. These followers of Hinduism, like those who first practiced the religion, believe in a cycle of birth, death, and **reincarnation**.

Vocabulary

reincarnation, n.
rebirth in a new
form of life

A complex social order emerged during the Vedic period. It was based on religious and social beliefs and is reflected

at times in the Vedas. Society was organized into four *varnas*, or classes, that were based on the work a person performed. These classes determined the kind of education, work, and life people had. This division of groups within society is called a **caste** system.

Vocabulary

caste, n. a division of society based on differences in wealth, social status, and occupation; a term introduced by the British to describe this element of Indian society



This sculpture shows Shiva, a major Hindu god. Shiva is believed to change and destroy parts of life so that they can be created new again.

Buddhism, Ashoka, and Jainism

Buddhism, another major world religion, also began in India, sometime around 600 BCE. With roots in Hinduism, many Buddhist beliefs and practices reflect ancient Indian culture. Like Hindus, Buddhists envision a cycle of life, death, and rebirth. They too believe that people's actions impact them and affect how they are reborn. However, Buddhists focus on ending the suffering that they believe is part of being alive. According to Buddhism, this suffering is often caused by people's attachment to ideas such as wealth, comfort, and power. If people practice certain behaviors, they may eventually end this suffering and reach a state of **nirvana**.

Vocabulary

nirvana, n. a state in which the human soul is at perfect peace

Around the time that Buddhism first developed, ancient India was made up of many small kingdoms. But starting in 321 BCE, a series of strong leaders conquered and unified the region. They created the Mauryan Empire.

After years of fighting revolts in the empire, the Mauryan leader Ashoka decided to pursue peace. While Hinduism and Jainism continued to flourish, Ashoka devoted himself to spreading Buddhism and building a better society.

He built hospitals and roads. He visited people in rural areas to learn about their needs and teach them Buddhist ways. He also had thousands of monuments called **stupas** built, where people could go to worship. The stupas helped spread the

Vocabulary

stupa, n. a dome-shaped monument where special religious objects are kept and people can worship

ideas and practices of Buddhism. People traveled to visit these holy sites, which increased trade and added to the wealth of the Mauryan Empire.



Some of the stupas and pillars Ashoka built still exist in India today.

Another religion that arose in ancient India is Jainism. Like Hindus and Buddhists, Jains believe in a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. To achieve greater knowledge and peace, Jains live in a simple and disciplined way that they believe is key to spiritual growth. Jains strongly emphasize nonviolence and try to avoid harming any living thing. Their practices include prayer, meditation, and fasting. Some scholars think that Jainism arose around the same time and place as Buddhism.

The Gupta Empire

After Ashoka's death in 232 BCE, the Mauryan Empire grew weaker. The next rulers did not carry on Ashoka's efforts to help people and work for peace. Conflict grew, and the Mauryan Empire split up into many small kingdoms. This period lasted for more than five hundred years. Then a new empire rose in the north, near the Ganges River: the Gupta empire.

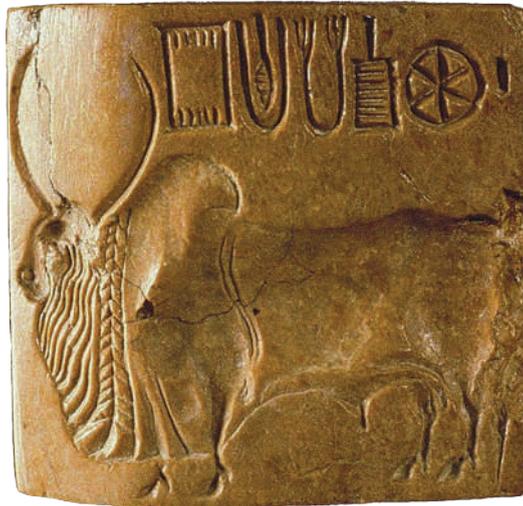
Under its strong leader Samudragupta, the Gupta empire expanded across northern India. Samudragupta conquered

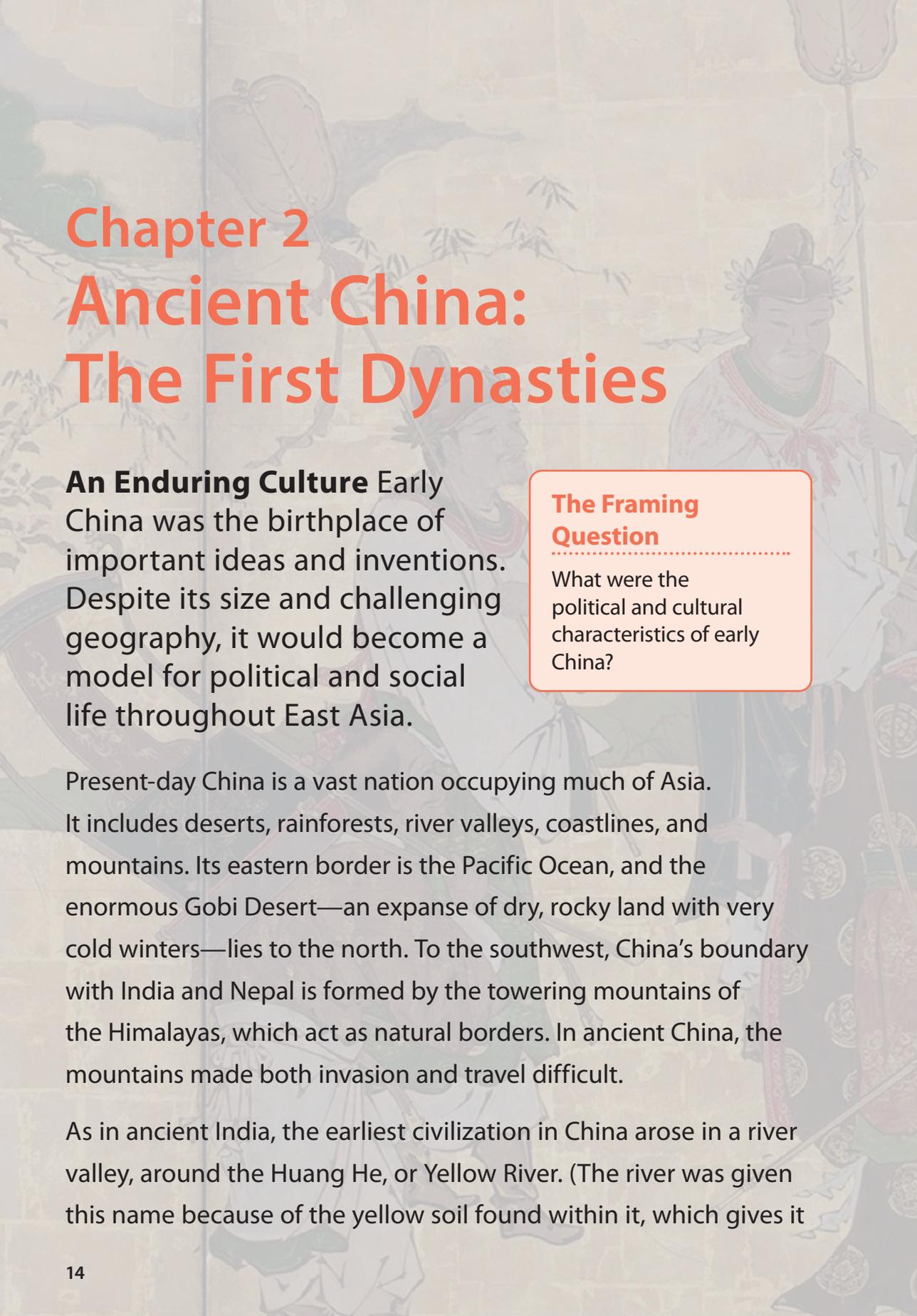
many lands but also supported the arts and the Hindu religion, as well as Buddhism and Jainism. The Gupta empire built many Hindu temples and supported Hindu scholars while also often supporting Buddhism, which continued to flourish. At the same time, world trade increased. New cities developed along routes that linked India to other parts of Asia and the Mediterranean world. Buddhism spread from India throughout much of Asia along this network of trade routes, known as the Silk Road.

The Gupta empire was also a time of new learning and experimentation. Mathematicians created the symbol 0 to stand for the absence of any value. This important idea allowed the field of mathematics to further develop. Gupta mathematicians also created the symbols for the numbers one to nine, still in use today. Scientists concluded that Earth is round and that it revolves around the sun. Doctors and dentists made many advances. They could treat broken bones and perform surgery. They even developed a drill for working on teeth. They used herbs and other natural substances to treat illness and sought to understand what causes disease in the first place.

The Gupta empire lasted for hundreds of years. It began to weaken in the 700s CE. Around this time, Islamic rulers rose to power in the Arabian Peninsula. They began to build a mighty empire that influenced many other regions, including India. Likewise, Indian cultural practices, including dances, clothing, food, and art, spread to societies around Southeast Asia and beyond.

PRIMARY SOURCE: INDUS VALLEY SEALS





Chapter 2

Ancient China:

The First Dynasties

An Enduring Culture Early China was the birthplace of important ideas and inventions. Despite its size and challenging geography, it would become a model for political and social life throughout East Asia.

The Framing Question

What were the political and cultural characteristics of early China?

Present-day China is a vast nation occupying much of Asia. It includes deserts, rainforests, river valleys, coastlines, and mountains. Its eastern border is the Pacific Ocean, and the enormous Gobi Desert—an expanse of dry, rocky land with very cold winters—lies to the north. To the southwest, China’s boundary with India and Nepal is formed by the towering mountains of the Himalayas, which act as natural borders. In ancient China, the mountains made both invasion and travel difficult.

As in ancient India, the earliest civilization in China arose in a river valley, around the Huang He, or Yellow River. (The river was given this name because of the yellow soil found within it, which gives it



This painting shows one artist's idea of an ancient Chinese king.

China



The ocean and mountains along some of China's borders made it difficult for enemies to invade, but they also made travel difficult. Rivers were key to survival.

a yellow hue.) Small villages had developed near the Huang He by at least 5000 BCE. The river and its floods brought water and silt that supported agriculture. More crops meant that more people could be fed, and the population increased. However, the floods often destroyed the communities on the river's banks. Over time, settlements also arose near the Yangzi, China's longest river, and then throughout the larger territory.

Life in Early China

Most people in early China were farmers. In the north, they grew grains such as wheat. Rice was a major crop in the south. Some people raised animals such as chickens and pigs. Near coasts and rivers, people also fished.

Another very important plant in ancient China was the mulberry tree. While its berries can be eaten, it was the tree's leaves that made it a major part of the Chinese culture and economy. Silkworms eat mulberry leaves and then build cocoons, in which they develop into moths. The material these worms use for their cocoons can be spun into silk thread. This thread can then be made into the fabric we know as silk. When China eventually began to trade with other regions, its silk became prized around the world.

The ancient Chinese people also developed one of the world's oldest writing systems. At first, the system used symbols to represent objects. Over time, it became more complex, with symbols that represented ideas and sounds as well.

Early Chinese civilization was shaped by several **dynasties** that built strong political states. The first, the Xia dynasty, is said to have united the villages and towns of the Huang He valley. Stories of the heroic Xia ruler Yu the Great tell of the struggle to control the Huang He. Yu, also called the Tamer of the Flood, is said to have spent thirteen years figuring out how to build **canals**. He hoped canals would solve the flooding problem that periodically ruined the lives of his people. The story shows how closely connected the Huang He's flooding was to the way early Chinese civilization developed.

Vocabulary

dynasty, n. a series of rulers who are all from the same family

canal, n. a channel dug by people; used by boats or for irrigation

The Xia dynasty lasted from about 2070 to 1600 BCE. Many scholars are unsure how much of what is said about the Xia dynasty actually happened. Some think the stories of Xia rulers

such as Yu may be legends based partially on facts. Others believe that some stories are true, especially since artifacts have been discovered that support them.

The Shang Dynasty

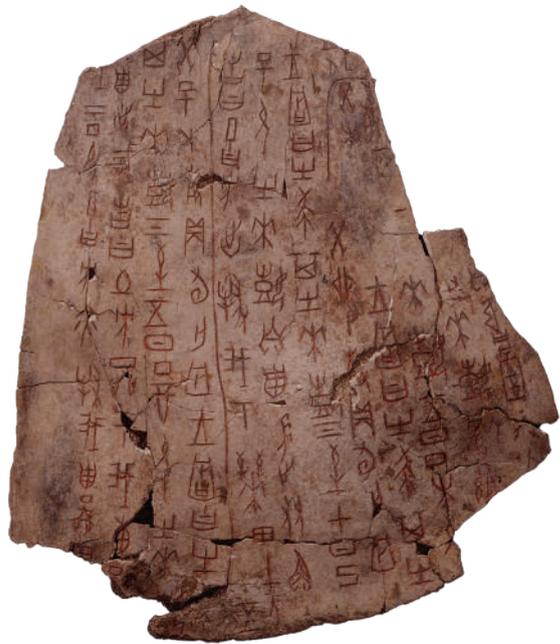
Around 1766 BCE, a new dynasty rose to power. The Shang dynasty ruled for more than seven hundred years. Shang society was likely organized into **city-states**. Kings, an upper class, and a merchant and artist class lived within cities. But most of the population lived in the countryside and farmed.

Vocabulary

city-state, n. a city that is its own political unit and has its own ruling government

Some of the oldest known writing in the world was done by the Shang people, who made carvings on animal bones.

These bones were used to try to predict what might happen. In ancient China, only the king had the privilege of trying to learn the future. To do so, a message was scratched onto the bones using a system of thousands of symbols. A priest would then apply heat to the bones and look for clues in the way they cracked.



This artifact is an example of ancient Chinese writing etched into a piece of bone.

The Zhou Dynasty

The Zhou dynasty followed the Shang dynasty. It took power in 1046 BCE and ruled for eight hundred years. Zhou kings were seen as having a **mandate** from heaven to rule.

This meant that their people believed kings were given the right to rule by the supreme power of the universe. If the king neglected his duty to this higher power or his subjects, the Mandate of Heaven could pass to another ruler. The idea of the Mandate of Heaven lasted even longer than the Zhou dynasty itself.

The Zhou developed a **feudal system**. The lands they controlled were divided into smaller, semi-independent kingdoms. Zhou rulers were the highest social class, followed by a class of Zhou **nobles**. Below these nobles were local rulers and lesser nobles. At the bottom of society were commoners, the largest group. Many of these people were peasants, or farmers and unskilled workers.

The Zhou made advancements in the writing system. They also created bronze objects and weapons. Over time, each of the kingdoms within the region grew more powerful. As long as these kingdoms paid taxes and remained loyal to the Zhou, the Zhou rulers

Vocabulary

mandate, n.
a command; a responsibility given by an authority

feudal system, n. a social organization in which kings, lords, and peasants are bound together by mutual obligations

noble, n. a member of a high social class



This container for wine was crafted from bronze during the Zhou dynasty.

felt that their system was working. However, many kingdoms were growing increasingly independent.

The Spring and Autumn Period

Starting around 770 BCE, the rulers of the Zhou kingdoms began to take more and more matters into their own hands. In some ways, this improved the lives of their subjects. Many of the rulers made improvements in their lands, such as irrigation systems and roads. Sometimes the kingdoms worked together to grow stronger or wealthier. This cooperation led to new ideas and ways of thinking.

In other ways, it was a difficult time. The central government of the Zhou declined. Increased wars led to a breakdown in order. Society was less stable. This uncertain time is called the Spring and Autumn period. This name comes from a text created during the same period called the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. It is one of the earliest written histories of China.

Vocabulary

annals, n. a record of events

Confucianism

Confucianism was a **philosophy** that grew out of the Spring and Autumn period. It was named for the Chinese philosopher Kong Qiu. He is known as Confucius in the West. The *Spring and Autumn Annals* was written in Confucius's home state of Lu.

Vocabulary

philosophy, n. the study of ideas about knowledge, life, and truth; literally, the love of wisdom

Confucius oversaw public works and justice at various times in his career. He wrote poetry, history, and philosophy that was

inspired by the problems he saw in society. People who learned from Confucius later wrote down his teachings. Over thousands of years, these writings have been reexamined and reshaped into a philosophy we now know as Confucianism.



The teachings of Kong Qiu, known in the West as Confucius, shaped how some people in ancient China thought about life.

Confucianism emphasizes several major ideas. These include ways of thinking about human sympathy and how people in different relationships should act toward and protect one another. In Confucianism, the family is the basic unit of society. **Filial piety** and loyalty are the most important **virtues**. In Confucius's time, this deep respect toward parents also related to rulers. The government was seen as an extension of the family. As the head of society, the ruler was like the head of the family. People owed their rulers loyalty and respect, and rulers had a duty to provide the people with a good government.

Vocabulary

filial piety, n. deep respect for one's parents

virtue, n. a high moral standard

Daoism

Daoism is another philosophy that many historians date to the time of the Zhou dynasty. It later developed into a religion. The core idea of Daoism is that the world works according to a natural

order called the *Dao*, or the Way. The Dao connects everything in the universe and keeps the world in balance.

Those who followed Daoism believed that understanding this balance required careful observation of the natural world. Like other ancient peoples, the Chinese studied the stars and planets. They began to develop the science of **astronomy**. They also expanded mathematical ideas from their observations of the sun, moon, planets, and stars.

Vocabulary

astronomy, n. the study of the stars, planets, and other features of outer space

Warring States

The Spring and Autumn period gave way to a long era of warfare among competing kingdoms, or states. The Warring States period lasted from about 481 to 221 BCE. Although the Zhou were still in power, rulers mostly ignored the dynasty. The Zhou dynasty eventually collapsed, and regional rulers competed for the mandate of heaven. Armies grew larger, and weapons became stronger.

This period of conflict finally ended when a strong new dynasty, the Qin, overpowered and then tried to unite the other kingdoms. Some of these efforts involved improving trade and transportation. This included construction of the Lingqu Canal. This waterway helped ease the passage of ships carrying grain by connecting different river systems. Other projects protected the people of China, such as a massive barrier built against China's northern neighbors. This was the first version of the Great Wall of China, which was built over many centuries.

PRIMARY SOURCE: EXCERPTS FROM *THE ANALECTS OF CONFUCIUS* AND THE *DAODEJING*

The Analects of Confucius (Confucianism)

“Learning without thought is labor lost; thought without learning is perilous.”

“What you do not want done to yourself, do not do unto others.”

—*The Analects of Confucius*, Book II, Chapter XV

The Daodejing (Daoism)

“To know and yet think we do not know is the highest attainment; to not know and yet think we do know is a disease.”

—*Daodejing*

Chapter 3

The City-States of Ancient Greece

A Land of Mountains and Sea

Ancient Greece was not a place defined by easy-to-see borders. It included the Greek mainland and nearby islands. It also included lands along many parts of the lengthy Mediterranean coast. The separation among groups of people in ancient Greece had a big impact on how civilizations developed there.

The Framing Question

In what ways were ancient Greek city-states alike and different?

Some of Greece is a peninsula, which means it is surrounded by water on three sides. Beyond this mainland, much of Greece is an

Vocabulary

archipelago, n. a chain of islands

isthmus, n. a narrow piece of land that connects two larger landmasses

archipelago of both small and medium-size islands. The largest island, Crete, lies about halfway between the Greek mainland and northeastern Africa. To the southwest is the Peloponnese. This is a second peninsula, connected to mainland Greece by a narrow stretch of land, or **isthmus**.



This ancient Greek mural of a charging bull was found on the island of Crete. The ancient Greeks produced beautiful art and architecture.

Much of the land of Greece was shaped by earthquakes and volcanoes. As a result, about 80 percent of the region is made up of mountains. This made travel between places difficult in ancient times. Cities developed apart from one another. The many mountains also meant there was little land for farming. However, these mountains—and the jagged coastlines—made Greek cities harder to attack and easier to defend.

In most regions of Greece, winters are mild. Summers are hot and dry. Rainfall is not plentiful. A lack of rain and farmland meant that ancient Greek farms were fairly small. Farmers grew wheat, barley, chickpeas, lentils, beans, olives, and grapes. Animals such as goats and sheep grazed on the mountainsides and were used as sources of meat and dairy products. Fish was also an important part of the Greek diet.

The early Greeks often turned to the water surrounding them for the resources they could not grow on or get from their land. They

Map of Ancient Greece, 500 BCE



This map shows how widespread the lands of ancient Greece were around 500 BCE. Many city-states were located along or near coastlines.

built ships and created ports along the coast. They became skilled seafarers and navigators, exploring many lands. In some places, they built **colonies**, where they could settle and trade far from home.

Vocabulary

colony, n. an area settled by people who come from elsewhere

The Minoans and Mycenaeans

Long before ancient Greeks sailed the seas around them, two other civilizations developed in the region. The first of these was the Minoans, who thrived on the island of Crete between about 2700 and 1500 BCE. Minoans grew crops, logged wood from Crete's valuable forests, and raised sheep. Today, historians know some of this group's other achievements from artifacts that have been discovered.

After thriving for more than a thousand years, Minoan civilization declined. Historians do not know why this happened. However, they do know that the Mycenaean civilization followed, from about 1700 to 1100 BCE. This group of people is named for the city of Mycenae in the Peloponnese region, where they lived. As with the Minoans, it is unclear why this civilization weakened and eventually disappeared. However, artifacts indicate that some parts of Mycenaean culture, including religious practices, influenced ancient Greece.

City-States

It was not until around 800 BCE that the people we think of today as the ancient Greeks began to develop as a civilization. As individual Greek kingdoms emerged, they grew quickly and became

city-states. In Greek, a city-state was called a **polis** (/poh*lihs/). Each polis included a main town or city as well as the land around it. Thanks to their ability to travel by boat, the Greeks were also able to set up colonies across a wide area. These colonies were independent but had trading relations with their “mother city,” known as a *metropolis*. While residents often shared a culture somewhat different from that of the Greeks, they supported their mother city in times of crisis, such as war.

Vocabulary

polis, n. a city-state of ancient Greece

Dozens of Greek city-states arose throughout the mainland and islands. Over time, groups of nobles took power from kings. These nobles ruled over the city-states, each of which had a unique character and government. The biggest, most powerful city-states included Athens and Sparta. At times, these two very different city-states were rivals. At others, they were allies.

Over time, the **citizens** within each polis began to take a more active role in how their city-state was governed. In fact, ancient Greece became one of the first societies in the world to develop the idea that a society should be run by its citizens.

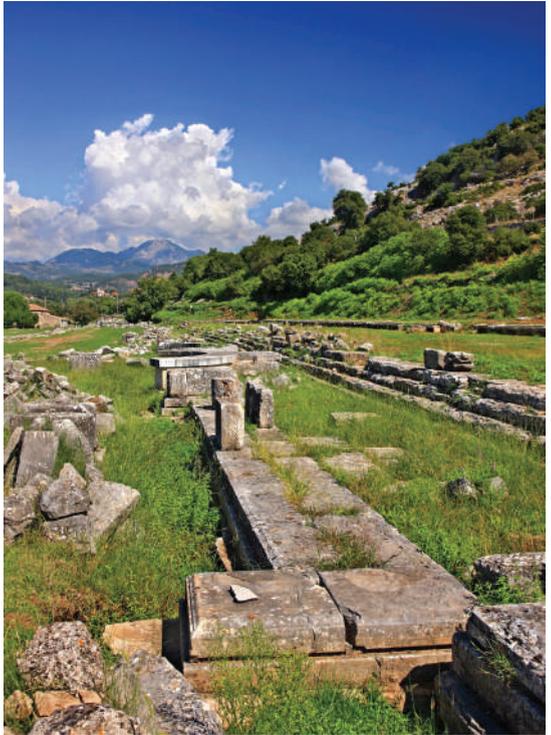
Vocabulary

citizen, n. in ancient Greece, a person with legal rights and responsibilities in a city-state

In Greece, a citizen was a resident of a city-state. However, in most city-states, only adult male property owners who were born there were citizens.

Generally, citizens participated in an assembly. Assemblies elected officials who used their legal rights and responsibilities to help govern the city-state. Their decisions were so important that they actually

affected how ancient Greek cities were built. Discussion happened out in the open so that people could listen to or make speeches as well as try to influence the decisions of the day. Due to this, most Greek city-states built an open public space called an *agora*. It served as both a marketplace and a meeting space.



Different Governments

Citizens often played a role in government decisions. Yet Greek city-states were still ruled by different forms of government. One form was **tyranny**. This was a system in which one person was a tyrant or dictator—someone who held all the power. A dictator was different from a king. A king often acquired their legal power to rule from a family member. But a tyrant's power depended solely on their ability to take and keep control. **Aristocracy** was another system, in which a few noble, or upper-class, families held power. Sometimes these families shared power with the assembly, but not always.

Thousands of years after they were built, the ruins of agoras can still be found in parts of Greece. These spaces were important for open discussion of issues.

Vocabulary

tyranny, n. a type of government in which one person holds all power, usually ruling in a harsh and brutal way

aristocracy, n. the upper or noble class whose members' status is usually passed down through family; government by such a class

Some city-states were ruled by an **oligarchy**, which was similar to aristocracy. Again, the power was held by only a few people. In fact, *oligarchy* means rule of the few. But in this case, the few were not only noble families but also wealthy, non-noble men.

Finally, there was **democracy**, which was different in ancient Greece from democracy as you know it today. In an ancient Greek democracy, power was shared by a large number of male citizens. These citizens took part in debates, decided on laws and how to carry them out, and elected officials. The Greeks seem to have been the first people to experiment with this kind of government. The experiment eventually caught on in the region. Democracy became the pattern of government in a number of Greek city-states. This was certainly true in the city-state of Athens.

Vocabulary

oligarchy, n. a government where all power is held by a small group of wealthy or powerful people

democracy, n. a form of government in which people choose their leaders

Athenian Democracy

Athens was one of the largest of the Greek city-states and also one of the most democratic. Today, we remember it as the birthplace of democracy.

At the center of Athenian democracy was the body of citizens known as the assembly. The assembly passed laws, set taxes, and voted on issues of war and peace. All Athenian male citizens were allowed to participate in the assembly. Before deciding an issue, the members of the assembly would debate it. Then they would

vote by holding up their hands. If a majority of those present supported the suggested law or action, it would be accepted.

The legal system was also quite democratic. Athenian law was divided into two sections. There were public laws, which had to do with the city-state. There were also private laws, through which people could work out their disagreements. If people broke public laws, they would have to pay fines or face the penalties that had been decided upon by the assembly. If people had disagreements with their neighbors, they would follow the processes of private law. They could take their neighbors to a law court near the marketplace and have a **jury** decide the cases.

Vocabulary

jury, n. a group of people who listen to information presented in court and make decisions about whether or not someone is guilty



In Athens, the assembly debated and voted on issues.

Limits of Athenian Democracy

It is important to understand that Athens was not completely democratic by modern standards. Women, children, enslaved people, and people born in other regions were not citizens. Therefore, they could not vote in the assembly or serve on juries.

Athenian women played an important role in religious affairs. But they had almost no rights when it came to government and laws. They could not own property or participate in debates in the assembly. Girls might receive some education at home, but they were not sent to school. Once they were grown, they were expected to have and raise their own children. The family was very important in ancient Athens, and Athenian women were expected to support it.

Athens was the greatest sailing and shipping power in the region—and a busy trading city. This meant it opened its doors to many people born outside of the city-state. Known as **metics**, these people played an important role in the Athenian economy. Many were artists, craftspeople, and merchants. Although some metics were very much respected by society and government, most never became citizens.

Vocabulary

metic, n. a foreigner living in an ancient Greek city

Life was much worse for enslaved people. They made up as much as a quarter or a third of the population. Enslaved workers cleaned, shopped, cooked, carried water, washed clothing, and helped raise children. Some enslaved workers were educated. Others were musicians who provided entertainment. But even the most talented enslaved person lacked any rights.

Athenian Education

The Athenians believed that every citizen should play a role in the government of the city-state. But they also understood that these men needed to understand the importance of this role. To help bring about this understanding, they promoted strong education for boys. To the Athenians, a good education would help the polis as well as the individual.

Athenian schools taught **logic**, reading, writing, arithmetic, and music. Boys learned to play stringed instruments and memorized poems. Additionally, every young man received two years of military instruction and many years of physical education. Athenian educators wanted to produce loyal Athenian citizens. However, they also wanted to produce cultured, well-rounded men who loved art, music, and sports. The perfect citizen would be equally comfortable on the battlefield and in the assembly.

Vocabulary

logic, n. the study of ways of thinking and making reasonable arguments



Boys in Athens often learned to play a stringed instrument called a lyre. In this painting, a priest and a king show their appreciation for this skill.

Sparta

The city-state of Sparta was located less than one hundred miles southwest of Athens. While there was not a great distance between the two city-states, there was a great difference in opinions on education. Spartans raised their children to be warriors. They had no interest in developing “well-rounded individuals,” or individuals of any sort. The Spartan educational system focused on military training, starting from a young age. The Athenians required two years of military training—but the Spartans required twenty-three! In Sparta, little time was spent on learning how to read or write. Instead, students focused on physical fitness.

This was because the entire Spartan city-state was a military unit. Everyone had a role to play in this military life. Spartan women did not fight, but they did have more rights than Athenian women. For example, they could own land. They were encouraged to take part in footraces and other sports so that they would be healthy mothers. Once they became mothers, they were expected to help raise their sons to be warriors.



Spartan warriors, like the one shown here, were the best-trained soldiers of their time. The small image is a bronze statue of a Spartan soldier from the 500s BCE.

The Spartans had their reasons for such sharp focus on military skill and bravery. They wanted to protect themselves against invasions. But there was another reason, too. The Spartans ruled over large numbers of enslaved people called **helots**. The life of a helot in Sparta was typically much worse than the life of an enslaved person in Athens. Despite harsh rules (or perhaps because of them), the helots sometimes rose in revolt. That was another reason the Spartans forced all male citizens to be warriors.

Vocabulary

helot, n. an enslaved person in Sparta

Spartan Government

Today, the government of Sparta is generally described as an oligarchy. The Spartans had not one but two kings. These two men were supposed to prevent each other from becoming greedy or unlawful tyrants. They were also in charge of the all-important army.

In addition to the kings, Sparta had a council of elders and an assembly. But Sparta's assembly was far less democratic than the one in Athens. Citizens were not allowed to debate issues. They could only approve or disapprove a proposed law or action. This was done by shouting, which was certainly different from the show of hands in Athens.

Spartan elections were handled in the same way. Citizens were called together in an open field and asked to shout for the candidate they preferred. Judges decided which candidate got the loudest shouts.

In general, the Spartans were doubtful about Athenian-style democracy. They believed that their way of life was better than the Athenian way of life.

The Persian Wars

Despite their differences, Athens and Sparta were sometimes able to work together when it benefited them both. This turned out to be the case during what is now known as the Persian Wars.

Around 546 BCE, the Greek city-states on the coast of Asia Minor came under the control of a group called the Persians. These people were from an empire that had developed in what is today the country of Iran. Tyrants, some of whom acted harshly, were put in place to rule each city-state.

In about 499 BCE, the city-state of Miletus rebelled against Persian rule. The people of Miletus asked Greeks in other city-states to help them overthrow the Persians. The Spartans refused, but the Athenians agreed to help. They conquered the Persian-controlled city of Sardis shortly after. Almost ten years later, they were victorious once again against the Persians at the Battle of Marathon.

The Persians were angry with the Athenians. In 480 BCE, yet another Persian army was sent to defeat not only Athens but all of Greece. Athens and Sparta put aside their disagreements and united against the Persians. They were joined by a few other city-states.

Greek victory did not come easily. The Persians marched to Athens and burned the city to the ground. They were then determined to conquer all of southern Greece.

The Persians had large ships, but the Greeks were more familiar with the waterways. The Athenian navy lured the Persian fleet into shallow, narrow waters between the mainland and the island of Salamis. There, the Greek ships rammed and sank the Persian ships.

Their victory in the Persian Wars allowed the Greek city-states to remain free and independent. After the

Persian Wars, Athens and Sparta were the two leading Greek city-states. They had united for the cause of the war. However, as soon as it was over, they took separate paths.



Although they were greatly outnumbered by the Persians, the Athenians were victorious at the Battle of Marathon.

The Peloponnesian War

In 431 BCE, nearly fifty years after they had driven the Persians from their homeland, Athens and Sparta fought each other in the Peloponnesian War. Spartans worried that Athens was becoming too powerful with other Greek city-states under its control.

They also did not like Athenian attempts to push Athenian-style democracy on to other city-states. Sparta's government was still an oligarchy.

The war dragged on for many years. The Spartan army was stronger than the Athenian army, which meant it was better in land battles. However, Athens had a stronger navy and was wealthier. Over time, the fighting weakened the Athenian army and navy. Then the Spartans began to build a navy of their own. They also convinced the Persians to take their side.

In 405 BCE, the Spartans scored a major victory at sea. This enabled them to cut off grain supplies to Athens. Athens held out as long as it could, but in 404 BCE, it surrendered. The Spartans and their allies had won the Peloponnesian War.

The Spartans made the Athenians tear down the walls around their city. They forbade Athens from having a navy, and they set up the government they wanted Athens to have. The city-state would now be ruled by a group of thirty nobles. There would be no more democracy.

However, the nobles were so unlawful and cruel that the Athenians rebelled against them within a year. In 403 BCE, democracy was restored. But what is now known as the Golden Age of Athens was over.

PRIMARY SOURCE: EXCERPT FROM PERICLES'S FUNERAL ORATION

One important citizen of Athens was Pericles (495–429 BCE). He became a powerful and influential man in the city-state during the Golden Age, the period of time between the end of the Persian Wars and the end of the Peloponnesian War.

We run our city-state differently than they do in nearby city-states. We prefer to be a model for other communities rather than copy them. Our government is a democracy because many people have a say in how it is run, not just a few. The law makes it so that everyone is treated equally in private disagreements, and we respect every person based on their good character and actions, not on their social class.

Even poor and unknown people can be helpful to others in our community. We are free and our neighbors are free to live as they see fit. We do not walk around with sad looks on our faces. Such looks may not do physical harm, but they still affect us negatively.



Athens accomplished many great things under the Golden Age leadership of Pericles.

Chapter 4

The Culture of Ancient Greece

A Great Civilization As you have read, the ancient Greeks were not a single people. They were a group of peoples and cities connected by language, culture, religion, and shared political and economic interests. Eventually, Greek culture spread far and wide to other civilizations.

The Framing Question

What were some of the cultural achievements of ancient Greece?

Despite their differences, the Greek city-states were unified by several cultural elements. One of these was their religion. The citizens of the various city-states worshipped the same set of Greek gods. Zeus was the chief god, but he shared power with other gods and goddesses. These included his wife, Hera; the sun god, Apollo; the sea god, Poseidon; and the love goddess, Aphrodite. The Greeks believed that these gods lived on Mount Olympus but came down from time to time to more closely influence the lives of the humans who lived on the land below. Greek religion also included many other minor gods and goddesses, as well as spirits and monsters that belonged to the natural world.



This illustration shows one idea of what the ancient city of Athens may have looked like.

The Greeks believed that it was necessary to honor, thank, and bargain with the gods to have a happy life. They did this in different ways. They built temples to honor them. They also told stories, or **myths**, about the gods' adventures—both good and bad ones. The Greeks used the alphabet of one of their trading partners, the Phoenicians, to develop their own alphabet. This was used to write down the myths as well as many other important texts and records. Over time, the myths became known across much of the world.



The myths about ancient Greek gods are still known around the world. Today, a statue of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, stands in Gran Canaria, one of Spain's Canary Islands.

Vocabulary

myth, n. a story explaining reasons for a belief or an event

The Arts in Ancient Greece

One of the temples the ancient Greeks built was to honor Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom. The city of Athens is named after this goddess. The temple, called the Parthenon, was constructed during Athens's Golden Age, between 447 and 432 BCE. It is the most famous structure in a group of buildings called the Acropolis, all of which overlook Athens. The rows of columns found on each side of the rectangular Parthenon are clues to ancient Greek architecture. The Greeks were so fond of columns that they

developed three styles of architecture, each of which was based on a different kind of column. These three styles were called Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian.

Drama was another important element of the Golden Age. Several playwrights shaped the tradition of Greek drama during this period. These writers wrote two kinds of plays: tragedies and comedies. Greek tragedies were serious and had sad endings. Comedies were funny and had happy endings. Athenians constructed large outdoor theaters for performances of these plays.

Athens also became known for its unique pottery, including bowls, urns, and vases. Craftspeople often decorated the pottery with pictures that showed Greek myths, religious practices, sports, and everyday scenes. As with the city's myths and plays, Athenian pottery made its way all around the Greek world and beyond.



This photo shows the remains of the Acropolis in Athens, including the Parthenon. It was badly damaged by an explosion in the late 1600s CE, but it still stands today.

The Olympic Games

Greek city-states came together for athletic competitions. One of the most famous athletic competitions was held in the city of Olympia, in the northwest region of the Peloponnese. These “Olympic games” were held every four years. Several months before the games began, a special engraved disk was carried to all the Greek city-states that were expected to compete. The messenger who brought the disk would inform everyone when the games would be held. The messenger would also explain the terms of the Olympic **truce**.

The city-states agreed to keep peace while athletes traveled to Olympia, attended the games, and returned home. This could take one to three months.

Vocabulary

truce, n. an agreement to stop fighting

The Olympic Games were part of a festival in honor of the god Zeus. The festival originally included parades and religious ceremonies. In 776 BCE, a footrace was added. Contestants ran the length of the stadium, about two hundred yards (183 meters). Later, additional events were added.



An athlete who won an event in the ancient Greek Olympic Games received a wreath of olive leaves. This is different from today’s Olympic Games, where medals are awarded to athletes.

Philosophers of Athens

The Peloponnesian War brought Athens's empire to an end—and its Golden Age. But the city-state survived. It rebuilt its democratic system. Though it was less wealthy and powerful than before, it managed to keep what it stood for and believed in. This included the value it placed on philosophy. Philosophy is a broad subject that involves the examination of many ideas, including the nature of the world and human life.

Ancient Greek philosophers developed several rival schools of thought. The Sophists were an early group who taught math, science, and other subjects. The Epicureans held that life should be about happiness and avoiding pain. But the Stoics rejected this view and focused on self-control and living simply.

Many of the most famous ancient Greek philosophers have connections to Athens. These include Socrates, the first philosopher of his kind. He developed an approach to working out **moral** problems. It involved asking a series of questions to get closer and closer to what a person really thinks or believes is true. This is called the Socratic method.

Vocabulary

moral, adj. relating to ideas of right and wrong

Socrates wrote nothing down. Most of what people today know about his life and ideas comes from his most famous student, the philosopher Plato. Socrates often appears as a character in Plato's works, many of which feature discussions between two characters.

In his text *The Republic*, Plato lays out his vision of a perfect society. This society is strictly organized with a wise ruler, the philosopher-king, at the top. The philosopher-king, as Plato imagined him, is curious and clever. As such, he can make the best decisions for society.



This painting is called *The Death of Socrates*. It was painted by Jacques-Louis David, a French artist, in the 1700s CE.

Plato set up a school called the Academy, where he taught many students who carried forth his ideas and methods.

Perhaps the most influential Greek philosopher was Aristotle, Plato's student and friend. Aristotle was fascinated by the world, and he wrote as many as two hundred texts. He wrote on many subjects, including theater, logic, government, and biology. Aristotle's work influenced thinkers and scientists throughout Europe and Asia for centuries.

Alexander the Great

During Aristotle's lifetime, a king named Alexander became extremely powerful. Some historians say he was the greatest general who ever lived. He certainly achieved a great deal during his brief lifetime and changed the Mediterranean world forever. Alexander conquered more land than anyone else before him. He also collected more wealth than any king before him—and

ruled more people. For these reasons, he is now called Alexander the Great.

Alexander had been one of Aristotle's students. His father was Philip II, the king of Macedonia, which was located in the north of the Greek peninsula. As a young man, Alexander helped his father conquer Greece. However, Alexander respected Aristotle and adopted the broad Greek culture as his own.

After his father's death, Alexander decided to attack Greece's old enemies, the Persians. In 334 BCE, the Persian Empire was still very large. It extended all the way to the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and included present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Middle East, and Egypt. Alexander conquered it all, establishing himself



Alexander the Great is considered one of the most determined conquerors in world history.

as the master of much of what he and his people knew to be the world.

Despite making many plans for the future of his empire, Alexander died from a fever in 323 BCE. He was only thirty-three years old. Yet the impact of his conquests and determination to spread Greek culture lived on for hundreds of years. In fact, the period from his death to 30 BCE is often known as the Hellenistic period, after the name the Greeks called themselves: the Hellenes. During the Hellenistic period, kings of other regions made coins that looked like Greek coins. Educators imitated the Greek style of education. Philosophers studied the works of Plato and Aristotle. Artists copied Greek statues and constructed buildings in the Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian styles. In cities throughout the Middle East and Asia Minor, learning and science flourished.

Empire of Alexander the Great, 300 BCE



This map shows the extent of Alexander the Great's empire in approximately 300 BCE. Many cities were named after the conqueror.

PRIMARY SOURCE: EXCERPT FROM ARISTOTLE'S NICOMACHEAN ETHICS

This work is usually thought to refer to Aristotle's son Nicomachus. One theory is that the work was dedicated to him, and another is that it was edited by him. However, it is possible that the work was dedicated to Aristotle's father, who was also named Nicomachus.

[Friendship] is a sort of virtue, or at least implies virtue, and is, moreover, most necessary to our life. For no one would care to live without friends, though he had all other good things.

It is when a man is rich, and has got power and authority, that he seems most of all to stand in need of friends; for what is the use of all this prosperity [wealth] if he has no opportunity for benevolence [generosity], which is most frequently and most commendably [admirably] displayed towards friends? Or how could his position be maintained and preserved without friends? For the greater it is, the more it is exposed to danger.

In poverty and all other misfortunes, again, we regard our friends as our only refuge [safe place]. We need friends when we are young to keep us from error, when we get old to tend upon us and to carry out those plans which we have not strength to execute ourselves, and in the prime of life to help us in noble deeds—"two together," for thus we are more efficient both in thought and in action.

Glossary

A

annals, n. a record of events (20)

archipelago, n. a chain of islands (24)

aristocracy, n. the upper or noble class whose members' status is usually passed down through family; government by such a class (29)

astronomy, n. the study of the stars, planets, and other features of outer space (22)

C

canal, n. a channel dug by people; used by boats or for irrigation (17)

caste, n. a division of society based on differences in wealth, social status, and occupation; a term introduced by the British to describe this element of Indian society (9)

citizen, n. in ancient Greece, a person with legal rights and responsibilities in a city-state (28)

city-state, n. a city that is its own political unit and has its own ruling government (18)

colony, n. an area settled by people who come from elsewhere (27)

D

democracy, n. a form of government in which people choose their leaders (30)

domesticate, v. to tame and use for agricultural or other purposes (5)

dynasty, n. a series of rulers who are all from the same family (17)

F

feudal system, n. a social organization in which kings, lords, and peasants are bound together by mutual obligations (19)

filial piety, n. deep respect for one's parents (21)

H

helot, n. an enslaved person in Sparta (35)

I

isthmus, n. a narrow piece of land that connects two larger landmasses (24)

J

jury, n. a group of people who listen to information presented in court and make decisions about whether or not someone is guilty (31)

L

logic, n. the study of ways of thinking and making reasonable arguments (33)

M

mandate, n. a command; a responsibility given by an authority (19)

metic, n. a foreigner living in an ancient Greek city (32)

monsoon, n. a wind from the south or southwest that brings heavy rainfall to Asia during the summer months (5)

moral, adj. relating to ideas of right and wrong (45)

myth, n. a story explaining reasons for a belief or an event (42)

N

nirvana, n. a state in which the human soul is at perfect peace (10)

noble, n. a member of a high social class (19)

O

oligarchy, n. a government where all power is held by a small group of wealthy or powerful people (30)

P

philosophy, n. the study of ideas about knowledge, life, and truth; literally, the love of wisdom (20)

plateau, n. a large, flat area of land that is higher than the surrounding lands (4)

polis, n. a city-state of ancient Greece (28)

R

reincarnation, n. rebirth in a new form of life (8)

S

seal, n. an object that is pressed into a soft material to leave a design or other mark (7)

stupa, n. a dome-shaped monument where special religious objects are kept and people can worship (10)

subcontinent, n. a major subdivision of a continent (2)

T

terra-cotta, n. baked or hardened brownish-red clay (7)

truce, n. an agreement to stop fighting (44)

tyranny, n. a type of government in which one person holds all power, usually ruling in a harsh and brutal way (29)

V

virtue, n. a high moral standard (21)



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